

Finite

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Squidward thought that everything in his life would forever be set in stone. But then something unexpected happens, something that catches him completely off-guard. How will the cynical cephalopod deal with it? Rated T for character deaths, but otherwise it's a K-rated story.

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The News

This is a sequel to my first Spongebob fic "Some Things Never Change". This chapter takes place on the exact same day. You should read that fic first before reading this one, otherwise you'll be confused. It's only 4,000 words or so, so it shouldn't take long.

Not much happened since Sandy arrived to deliver the newest Gary. This one would be Gary VI? Yes, Gary VI. Squidward might not have been the biggest fan of snails, he actually despised the slimy vermin, but he had the common decency to mark their graves at the ever-expanding pet cemetery he inevitably created at Jellyfish Fields. Squidward just hoped that Sandy made sure to fix the new snail up before bringing her here, otherwise Spongebob would be beyond confused if Gary gave birth to a litter.

Worse still, the yellow nimrod would probably come bother him about it to quell his confusion. He did know where babies came from? Right? Guess he would find out eventually.

Rubbing his droopy nose, Squidward tried to focus on his magazine, the latest issue of Fancy Living Digest. He couldn't believe that magazine was still running, or that he was still subscribed to it, after all these years. Reading it allowed him to depart from the real world, if ever so briefly, and experience the dream he never could have lived. Fortunately, all the customers were currently sitting at their tables and munching on their junk food, and there weren't too many today. Those that came were familiar faces, now accompanied by their adult children and their new grandchildren.

Grandchildren? Squidward grew a small, involuntary smile. After two decades, he and his clique of unwanted acquaintances still were Bikini Bottom's most ineligible bachelors. Spongebob was still too childish-minded to even ponder the notion of settling down, Patrick

was just a deadbeat hedonist, Sandy wasn't exactly a catch by Bikini Bottom standards, given the massive species gap and the citizens' general narrow-mindedness, and Krabs used to be and still was married to his one true love; money. Why the old miser adopted Pearl was still beyond him? Children cost money and Krabs hated spending money, Squidward knew that much.

As for himself, Squidward never did have much luck with the ladies, like with everything else in life. Squilliam and his other classmates voted him "most likely to die alone" during senior year at high school and it seemed they were right on the money. He didn't really regret it though. Taking everything into consideration, given his rotten luck, he probably would have ended up with a massive nag that would have given Plankton's robotic spouse a run for her money and children that would have made great company for Pearl, unmotivated slackers who would never leave his house and ask him for change every day. Squidward shuddered at the thought of that. That would have been the last thing he needed on top of having Spongebob and Patrick as neighbors.

Some varnishing liquid dripped on his head, causing him to look up. "Spongebob! Would you mind?" he barked irritably while shielding his magazine below his right tentacle. "Try to be more careful!"

"Heard you loud and clear, *Mr. Tentacles* !" Spongebob saluted him while holding a mop in his other hand, hanging upside down from the ceiling with the help of two suction cups attached to his shoes. How he had the bucket stuck to the ceiling or kept the liquid from spilling gout was less clear. "I'm almost done varnishing the ceiling!"

Squidward exhaled and went back to his magazine. Suddenly, the phone on his counter rang, making him jolt a bit.

"Hello, Krusty Krab?" he picked up the call, as usual answering with zero enthusiasm. "Sorry, sir. But we're closed."

" *Squidward!* " a familiar gravelly voice was heard from the other end of the line, making the octopus snap to attention.

"Mr. Krabs!" he chuckled nervously. "Eh...everything's going great at the Krusty Krabs. No need to worry. How is New Kelp City?"

" Never mind that! I need to tell ye somethin' pronto! "

"What did you say?" Squidward made a face. His boss's voice was hard to make out over the roaring winds.

" RAAAAAWWWRRRR! " Squidward jerked back and flinched from the deafening noise.

"No time fer details! I hit a few roadblocks, so I might not make it back by tomorrow!" Krabs hastily answered as he was being chased by a pair of yeti crabs high up in a snowy mountain range, in the middle of a blizzard.

He skimmed his free claw through the snow, forming a huge snowball. He used the ammo to hit one of the yetis in the face, knocking it down. The other lunge at him and Krabs barely dodged its huge claw.

" Mr. Krabs? What's going on there? "

Krabs backflipped, striking the beast in the jaw with his leg.

"Scratch that!" he shouted into the phone. "I'll *definitely* not be back by tomorrow!"

A third yeti crab charged at him and Krabs jumped at it, decking the hairy giant in the face again and again.

" That the best ye got, ye glorified fur coat! Me ole mother pinches harder than that! "

The stupefied Squidward kept listening. "Eh, should I take this as meaning I'll be managing the Krusty Krab again tomorrow?"

He only heard strange, garbling noises in response. "Mr. Krabs?"

" *Just try t' swallow me! I'll claw me way back out!* " Squidward cringed as he heard further sounds of struggling and what sounded like teeth getting shattered.

"Yes! Yes! Ye'll be runnin' me galley! Again!" a drool-covered Krabs finally responded while prying the now toothless yeti crab's jaw wide open with his claws and legs. "Everythin' better be in order when I come back!" he warned the octopus as he jumped out of the yeti's mouth, only to find himself surrounded by the other two.

"RAAWR!"

"Call ye back, Mr. Squidward!" Krabs hung up before jumping high, spin-kicking one yeti crab in the face and then grabbing the other one's arm, swinging on it and landing on its back.

"Ye besties are tough, I'll give ye that!" Krabs admitted while holding on to the flailing yeti crab's back, who roared in anger but couldn't reach him.

Ignoring the biting cold and pounding blizzard, Krabs pulled off his winter jacket and pulled it over the yeti's head, blinding it.

It flailed around furiously, while the now bare-chested Krabs jumped off it and then rammed his body into the yeti crab. The giant whimpered as it found itself tipping over the edge of a cliff, swinging its arms before finally plummeting into the foggy abyss. Krabs spotted the remaining two yetis, both beaten and bruised, running at him.

Gritting his teeth, he charged at them and skid between one of the yeti's legs, leaving behind a large impression in the deep snow. He finally caught his sword, which had been stuck in the snow, before somersaulting over the two beasts and landing gracefully on his short peg legs.

"Argh! Enough of this! I have places to be!" he now had a western-style stare-off with the two yetis. Without his jacket, he needed

something else to keep him warm. Both parties growled and sent each other death glares.

"Let's end this, ye hulkin' furballs! Mano a mano!" Krabs exclaimed before running at them with his sword.

Meanwhile, a speechless Squidward just put the phone down, as Spongebob walked up to him, making suction cup noises as he walked down the wall.

"Was that Mr. Krabs? How's he doing?" he asked chipperly.

"He said there was a delay?" Squidward just shrugged. "Looks like we'll be managing the Krusty Krabs alone once more tomorrow."

Spongebob gasped, before his pupils grew in excitement and he gave a babyish smile of pure, unadulterated happiness.

"We'll be managing the Krusty Krab alone? Again!" he repeated, unable to believe his earholes. "Squidward! This is incredible! Mr. Krabs already trusts us to be running his restaurant alone for more than 24 hours?!"

"Yeah, I guess?" the octopus replied indifferently. He did wonder if this could be the last time they heard from Old Man Krabs? Maybe he would become the Krusty Krab's new manager permanently? But Squidward didn't celebrate prematurely, for he knew Krabs was a tough customer.

"It's all happening so quick!" an overjoyed Spongebob held his chest as he was trying not to fall into another bliss coma. "The students are becoming masters! Dreams do come true!"

Squidward's eyes shifted at the wall clock and he gave a shifty smile. "Yes, they do." He said sneakily.

He cleared his throat. "Eh, Spongebob?"

"Yes, *Mr. Tentacles* ." The sponge shot him two finger guns and snapped his fingers.

"Did you...eh...? Did you remember to vacuum your grill today?" Squidward asked faux-seriously.

"Oh, I don't think I have?" Spongebob put his finger to his lip, feeling bashful over it.

"Then get to it already?" Squidward said sternly. "The Krusty Krabs has a standard of cleanliness to uphold."

"Understood, captain!" Spongebob saluted him, now sporting a serious look before marching into the kitchen.

Once he was gone, Squidward literally slithered his way to the wall clock and got up, making sure nobody was watching him. It was 4.20 p.m. and Squidward moved the pointers to read 6.30. Neptune, this felt amazing! He had been dying to do this for over 20 years!

A loud ring echoed through the restaurant, alerting all the patrons. To Squidward, it was music to his earhole.

"Sorry, folks." Squidward announced and clapped his tentacles. "But we're closed."

The fish all complained, but Squidward couldn't care less as he walked by every table and gave each customer a take-out bag. "Don't care, take your slop with you."

"This can't be right? My watch says it's only 4.21?" Fred lamented while pointing at his wristwatch.

"I guess you need new batteries." Squidward said carelessly as he shoved a take-out bag into his fins.

"But I'm meeting with my son and grandson here?" the olive fish pleaded. "It's little Freddy's 10th birthday? Fred Jr. promised him that-wow!"

"If I cared I'd let you know." Squidward said dryly and lifted him up, carrying him to the door.

"Hey, let me go!" Fred cried before being tossed into the street, crashing off-screen.

"My leg!" he cried while Squidward dusted his tentacles before inhaling and exhaling with relief. Cutting his shift by two hours? Now that was a dream come true!

"What's going on, Mr. Tentacles? Why is the Krusty Krab empty all of a sudden?" Spongebob appeared, carrying a vacuum cleaner.

"It's closing time, Spongebob." Squidward casually pointed at the clock. Predictably, the revelation broke the little twit's heart.

"Closing time? Already?" Spongebob frowned sadly and dropped the vacuum. "Boy, vacuuming my grill took longer than I thought?"

His pupils grew in size and his eyes started watering. "Time passes so quickly, huh? I guess all good things must come to an end?"

Squidward rolled his eyes at his coworker's melodramatic reaction and locked the door before putting Mr. Krabs's keys in the skin pocket on his waist. Wait what?

"Quit being a drama queen, will ya? We'll be back here tomorrow." The octopus told him halfheartedly.

"Yeah, but that will take forever." Spongebob looked crestfallen.

Squidward sighed tiredly. "How about you go pay Sandy a surprise visit or something? That should cheer you up?"

Spongebob immediately perked up. "That's a great idea, sir! Thank you for sharing your wisdom!"

He jumped and hugged Squidward around his waist, much to the latter's chagrin.

"I already feel so much better!"

"Control. Urge. To. Kill." Squidward told himself through clenched teeth.

Right then, a female fish walked by with her child. Squidward recognized her as Sandra, the daughter of their old regular Saddy. Like her mother, she was orange in color with red lips, and usually wore purple dresses. But both her and her son were dressed in black this time, but Squidward failed to notice that as he was preoccupied flushing in embarrassment as Sandra sent him and Spongebob a scrutinizing glare.

"Come on, Alister." She said harshly and pushed her son to walk faster. "We don't associate with such people."

Squidward deflated in resignation, with the ever-oblivious Spongebob still clinging on to him.

Why did the two of them constantly have to end up in compromising positions in public?

Cue bubble transition.....

"All things considered, today wasn't too bad." Squidward told himself as he took the short walk to his home at Conch Street. With Spongebob off bothering Sandy, he might get to enjoy a peaceful evening.

Today was a lovely day, fit for a bike ride across town, but in his age, Squidward could no longer muster up the energy after working hours to do that. Maybe on Sunday?

Squidward opened the door and walked into his humble living room, pondering what to do with his free evening. Finish his latest self-portrait? Water his flower garden? It occurred to him that he had been neglecting it for the past few weeks? Pop in his DVD of season two of Fab and Fancy? Fab and Fancy, he thought nostalgically? He

was probably the only person left in Bikini Bottom who still remembered that severely underrated show.

Read his newspaper? Yes, that would be a good start. Take things slow. Squidward had left it in his kitchen for two days now, a few crazy antics involving a certain sponge prevented him from reading the latest issue of The Bikini Bottom Examiner sooner. It probably wouldn't be too interesting, as usual. Little happened in this sleepy little hick town, but it would be a nice way for him to kill time while preparing and drinking some herbal tea. So Squidward headed for his kitchen.

"Hey, Squidward." Patrick waved to him as they passed by each other. The starfish was holding a large ham, a string of sausages, a big wheel of cheese and a box full of bagels.

"Hey, Patrick." Squidward waved back before halting in his tracks. "Patrick?!" he looked over his shoulder and saw the fat starfish making himself comfortable on his couch and turning on the tv.

Squidward wanted to yell at him to get out of here, but he couldn't bring himself to do it. He just sighed and deflated in defeat. Years of experience had taught him that trying to get rid of the pink bufoon would be a futile effort. Instead, Squidward headed to his kitchen and came back with a freshly cooked turkey on a platter and a big glass of warm milk. Don't ask me how he found either of those things at the bottom of the ocean.

"Comfortable, Patrick?" Squidward tried to sound civil.

"You bet!" Patrick replied happily while biting out a big chunk of flesh out of the ham. "Befth hamph ahm ehmfh tusthed..." he continued with a full mouth.

Squidward wanted to hurl from watching this uncouth lout's vulgar table manners but kept his cool. He glanced at his tv and saw that Patrick was watching a clownfish decked up in a clown costume

fumbling around and getting hit in the head by a coconut. Now that was clever comedy if he had seen any?

Patrick laughed and pointed at it, spit and chunks of ham spilling all across Squidward's coffee table and floor. The octopus seethed.

"He gogh hith inph the headh by a coconuth!"

"Um, Patrick?" Squidward spoke up as he placed the turkey and glass of milk on the table. "I brought you something?"

Patrick looked mesmerized by it. "Wow! That looks yummy!"

Squidward swung his fist. "It sure is. Might I suggest you start your fine dining experience with this? Warm milk will really help you chug that stuff down faster and it will prevent any indigestion."

Patrick didn't need to be told twice. Opening his mouth wide, he wolfed down the turkey, his cheeks puffing up as he chowed down on it and swallowed it in one gulp. Squidward recoiled in disgust but then relaxed and walked off as Patrick gulped down the two liters of warm milk next.

"Bon appetit, Monsieur Moron." Squidward said simply and left him to enjoy his low brow show. He knew now that letting Patrick fall asleep in his home was a much better way to get rid of him than trying to kick him out. Once Patrick fell asleep, whole days might pass before he woke up again.

A little later, while Patrick was snoring and drooling with his face planted on Squidward's coffee table, the octopus sat at his kitchen table and placed a steaming teapot on it. He took a whiff of the steam and savored the soothing scent.

"Ahhh..." he sighed in a relaxed tone as he poured some tea into a glass. "Now that's how you spend your afternoon."

Squidward had never led an active life, now more so than ever. Home was where he would indulge in his artistic endeavors, secluded from the crude world he was born into. He had promised himself that he would try to enjoy his hobbies as just that, hobbies. Not as a means to pursue some pipe dream of fame and stardom. Tonight, he would do it just for fun.

In his futile quest for success, he had often forgotten how to simply enjoy his passions. Not tonight. Tonight would be different. After all, he was almost 60 years old, who knew how much time he had left? He had to make the best out of his lousy life, while he still could. With that bloated bum knocked out cold, Spongebob pestering Sandy and Mr. Krabs being away doing Neptune knows what, and possibly being dead, tonight might just be the perfect opportunity to kick back and finally enjoy himself.

"Let's see what's new in Bikini Bottom?" he said after taking a sip of his tea. "Probably nothing major. Maybe some news about Mrs. Puff's parole?" He snarked as he took a gander at the frontpage.

But the title he read, typed in capital letters and with a big exclamation mark, was anything but mundane. Squidward's eyes bulged and he rubbed them. Surely he must have misread it?

He took a second look but read the exact same thing. The news made his jaw drop.

SQUILLIAM FANCYSON III HAS DIED!

How is that for a cliffhanger? Squidward just found out that his most hated enemy is sleeping with the fishes? How is he going to react to it?

I got the idea for this fic after realizing how Squilliam hasn't made a proper appearance since "Keep Bikini Bottom Beautiful", which aired in 2010 . A whole decade ago. And no, fanboys. I don't count brief cameos, like him appearing as one

of Squidward's noses in "Code Yellow" as proper appearances, I mean real physical appearances by the monobrowed snob himself. For some reason, despite being Squidward's arch-rival, the show hasn't used him as a character for a whole decade now and based on some tweets made by current staff on the show, they (for whatever reason) don't have any future plans for him either. They might backpaddle on that, they probably will, if the show keeps going for another two decades or so, but either way, this got me thinking and gave birth to this story.

It will most likely be a two-parter, possibly a three-parter, and like its prequel, it will be more of an introspective peace, but once more, I will also try to weave in some classic Spongebob comedy.

Who's the Victor?

Good thing Squidward had swallowed his first sip of tea, otherwise it would have been spilled all across the table. He had to triple-check. This must have been some kind of dream?

SQUILLIAM FANCYSON III HAS DIED! That was what the headliner read. Squidward read the rest of the article, his mind racing and thoroughly fixated on it.

"Last night, beloved millionaire and artistic genius has been pronounced dead?"

"Bikini Bottom in shock?"

"Everyone caught up in collective mourning?"

"Died at the tender age of 35?"

"Held huge celebration in honor of winning the Nobel Prize for musical achievements?"

"Retreated to the bathroom after witnesses claimed to have seen Mr. Fancyson exhibiting signs of fatigue?"

"After failing to arrive to blow his birthday candles on the largest cake in Bikini Bottom history, his staff went looking for him?"

"Died of heart attack on toilet?"

"Funeral held in two days?"

Squidward read the article two more times. He couldn't wrap his mind around it? It was real? Squilliam Fancyson, the person he hated the most had passed away? Squilliam was gone? Dead? Just like that? Squidward put the newspaper down, and proceeded to stare blankly into space, caught up in his own musings.

"Squilliam died?" he said impassively. Slowly but surely, he was grasping the reality of the news. Accepting it as reality, and not just as some hallucination or dream. Now that he thought about it, Squidward made sure to pinch himself a couple of times just to be on the safe side.

After tearing up in pain and seeing several bruises form on his teal-colored tentacle, he knew that what he had read was in fact real. Right now would have been the moment where Squidward leaped with joy and threw a one-man party, like on those few occasions he thought Spongebob had moved out of Bikini Bottom.

Why shouldn't he? This was the person who had been making his life miserable since high school? The person who took such glee in rubbing his success in Squidward's nose? Who made it a hobby to watch him get humiliated? And now he was no more. A long-running and very, very one-sided rivalry that had been going on since the spring of 1973, when the two octopuses met in band class as high school freshmen, was finally over? Squidward no longer had to worry about his arch-enemy.

Squidward had certainly entertained the idea several times when he was especially mad at Squilliam, and needless to say, the rich snob had really ticked him off on numerous occasions, and now that idle fantasy had become a reality? This should have been a moment of celebration. But, that's not what happened.

Squidward was surprised by it, but his immediate response to reading this news wasn't overwhelming joy. It sure wasn't sadness. Heck no! What was it then? His feelings about the news could only be described as hollowness. It made him feel empty? But that couldn't be right? Why would Squilliam's death fill him with emptiness of all things? He should have been ecstatic right now. Jumping with joy despite the decrepit nature of his aging body. Maybe he was still processing the news? Trying to accept the fact that this was real after all? But it was printed right there, in the newspaper he was holding? What more proof did he need?

He finally remembered his tea. Squidward touched the pot and realized it was icy cold. Had he really spaced out that long? Over Squilliam?

"Fishpaste." Squidward grumbled and drank the rest of his now cold tea. Why waste it? Maybe a refreshing drink would help clear his mind? But after emptying the pot, he still felt the same. Confused. Hollow.

"Maybe finishing that self-portrait will clear my mind?" he thought and remembered that he had planned to have a fun evening tonight. Why should this news spoil that? Not like he cared about Squilliam. By all logic, this news should have made his evening all the more enjoyable. He punched out at work two hours early and now his hated enemy was a goner. By Squidward's standards, he was on a roll today.

Squidward spent the rest of his days working vigorously on his painting. As usual, his focus was entirely on it, the world around him melted away. But he couldn't get Squilliam out of his head. Instead of feeling a sense of exuberance as he painted tirelessly and meticulously, he was met with more frustration and confusion. By the time he finished, he realized that he had made one big error. He gave himself a unibrow, making himself look like...

"Dangnabbit.." Squidward grumbled and almost punched a hole through the painting but then calmed down. Getting up from his chair, he walked up to his porthole window and looked out into the night sky.

Squilliam's funeral was scheduled in two days? But that newspaper was two days old? So had the funeral been held today? Doing the math, Squidward realized it must have been. Was that the reason there hadn't been a big rush at the Krusty Krab? Why he had to deal with relatively few customers?

Squidward felt the need to check again, so he walked downstairs and sat down on his couch, next to Patrick, who was still asleep

face-down on the coffee table. Not even noticing the fat slob, Squidward changed the channel to the evening news and sure enough, there were Perch Perkins and Realistic Fish Head in a newsroom discussing the most high-profile funeral to ever happen in Bikini Bottom.

Both news anchors talked about it like it was some profound tragedy, and it was accompanied by plenty of b-roll showing masses of fishes dressed in black assembling at the Bikini Bottom cemetery, even standing in lines *outside* the cemetery as if they were waiting to go on some popular new ride at Glove Universe. There were plenty of brief interviews with people who mourned the octopus's passing, ranging from other artists and performers he had collaborated with, to numerous people that sponsored him and endorsed his work, to the many girlfriends he has had, and he had amassed a whole nation of them over almost five decades.

Squidward recognized quite a few of these faces. Specifically, they were people who had publicly lambasted Squilliam, people he had slighted, be it professionals calling him out on his tactless behavior and poor treatment of them or mere bimbos who whined over him leaving them with the check and never contacting them again. All of their accusations had been, unsurprisingly, forgotten by the media as quickly as they were brought up. Much like the people themselves, the media had the attention span of a fish. But now they all changed their tune? Was it for the sake of good PR or did they just not want to speak ill of the dead?

Either way, any idiot could tell that any dirt surrounding Mr. Fancyson would be swept under the rug and the octopus would forever be lionized as a great hero and genius. He would remain very much alive in this town, via his image being plastered everywhere and constantly being endorsed by the media. Future generations of Bikini Bottomites would probably be taught about him at grade school via very biased lectures citing whitewashed biographies. Squilliam Fancyson would, in a sense, achieve immortality through his mere legacy.

Squidward watched the news report impassively but then he saw what he had been looking for, video footage showing an open casket. That's when Squidward's eyes widened and his vertical pupils dilated ever so slightly. There it was. Indisputable footage of his rival lying on his back, holding a rose and wearing the finest suit, completely limp and peaceful, his eyes closed, as numerous mourners passed by him and bawled their eyes out while giving their final farewell. The final bit of b-roll showed a huge tombstone surrounded by a whole forest of flower bouquets.

That's when Squidward turned the tv off. Now he was sitting quietly in the darkness, the only audible sound being Patrick's snoring. He had his conformation, but it didn't make him feel any less hollow. Just what did he expect to find? The Bikini Bottom Examiner was a very respectable source, a legit newspaper company, not some dodgy at best tabloid like Bottomfeeder? That should have been all the confirmation he needed? Perhaps he just needed to hear other people say it out loud in order to truly accept it? Whatever it was, Squidward felt no less confused.

With nothing else to do, he walked upstairs, took a shower, brushed his teeth and went to bed. Just going through the motions. Sleep didn't come to him easy, as his mind was still racing and he spent some two hours staring at the ceiling before finally drifting off to sleep.

Three years ago.....

This had been the last time Squidward had spoken to his long-time rival personally. As much as he enjoyed seeing "Squiddy" squirm, Squilliam was a very busy octopus. You didn't get to be a celebrity by doing nothing. Well, some did....okay, *many* did, but Squilliam was surprisingly not one of them. As much as it pained Squidward to admit it, Squilliam did have talent. For that reason, he only had so much spare time to torment his old schoolmate. Besides the Bubble Bowl thing, which Squidward was pretty certain Squilliam had set up

to humiliate him, many of their encounters were actually by accident or they were instigated by Squidward himself, or both.

The year was 2017, and as usual, Squidward got entangled in Mr. Krabs's latest hair-brained scheme to make a quick buck, and share as little of the profit as possible with Squidward and Spongebob. Patrick was being paid in rocks. No, really. It started off simple enough, the Krusty Crew, along with Patrick, tried their luck at the catering business. Their latest gig had been to cater at a kid's birthday party, and suffice to say, it was a nightmare, but by some stroke of luck, they ran into an upper-class twit who thought they were a fancy catering company. Yes, two middle-aged men-children, a crusty, old sailor and an aging tortured artist all dressed in raggedy, casual clothing definitely invoked the image of high-class caterers.

But of course, Krabs jumped at the chance for a big paycheck. A literal big paycheck. Needless to say, the exploit was a complete disaster and Squidward was sure it was a one-time deal, like so many other wacky schemes his tightwad boss had dragged him and Spongebob into. But then a week later, they got a call from the Fancyson estate. That's when Squidward begged Neptune to have him get run over by a bus, or get caught by a hook, or mauled to death by a pack of rabid alley worms. Anything to get him out of this.

He naturally tried everything in his power to bail out of this but his penny-pinching boss strong-armed him into doing this with the usual "Do it or ye're fired!" threat. At least this time, their "Krusty Katering" operation was done completely legally. Squilliam claimed this was his way to show that he did not view himself as above the little guy, but Squidward knew his game.

They were far from the only people catering at Squilliam's 36th birthday party, four waiters couldn't possibly suffice for a giant mansion filled with thousands of party guests. Squilliam did it to flush out Squidward and make him be present at his big party so the former could witness firsthand how successful Squilliam had become and how many people adored him.

Squidward had hated every second of that night. Every second was pure agony. He actually missed serving disgusting, germ-ridden children. He would have preferred being strapped to a chair and forced to listen to Spongebob's laughter nonstop for the entire night. It's been so long since he felt so much dread and hate, given how years of utter misery had made him virtually numb to emotion at this point. He would have preferred literally being anywhere else but some grand event lionizing Squilliam Fancyson.

"Who wants food? I'm a mindless drone with food. Working for the man." He, dressed in a rented tuxedo, droned lifelessly.

"Don't mind if I do." Lord Royal Highness appeared and tasted some of the fine cuisine. The Atlantean monarch did not recognize Squidward at all. Why would he?

Squidward and co only came to his city for one day ten years ago, and Patrick did what he did best by destroying the Atlanteans' most ancient and valued relic. Just as they were in hot water, Plankton randomly appeared in a tank that shot ice cream of all things and conveniently absolved them of their crime by becoming the city's new big attraction. That was a pretty stupid day, now that he thought about it?

"Simply divine. Keep up the good work, my good man." Lord Royal Highness walked away just as quickly and tipped Squidward with a shiny, multi-colored moon rock. Apparently, that was Atlantean currency.

Squidward rolled his eyes. Guess he could use it as a fancy paperweight?

"If there's a bouncer nearby who would like to throw me out into a dumpster for some perceived offense I didn't commit, be my guest?" he droned, but no bouncer took up the offer. Just his luck.

But there was at least one positive to this night, if you could call it that. At least he didn't have to deal with Squilliam himself. After all,

Squilliam was the big star of the evening, the millionaire celebrity birthday boy, while Squidward was the lowly nobody serving shrimp cocktail and caviar to the snotty guests, which was pretty disturbing and unethical when you thought about it?

Squilliam had so many famous and equally rich guests to greet and chat with, why would he bother to look for his old classmate, a nobody who was working as a cashier at the Krusty Krab? Why, that in of its self would have been like looking for a needle in a haystack, given how massive this gathering was?

But just as Squidward felt a small slither of hope, he heard a familiar voice.

"Enjoying the evening, Squiddy?"

Squidward nearly dropped his tray. A look of pure horror washed over his features as he slowly turned around and found the birthday boy himself facing him, tentacles folded, wiggling his unibrow and sporting a smug smirk, which was pretty much his default expression. He was wearing a sparkling, silver tuxedo and red bowtie, just to emphasize he was the star of this party.

"Squilliam?!" Squidward blurted. "What are you doing here?"

"Oh, I dunno?" the other octopus humored him in a smarmy tone. "Could it be that this is my mansion and my birthday party?" For emphasis, Squilliam gestured at a 6-foot ice statue of himself standing in the middle of the punch fountain. Patrick, also wearing a tuxedo, was leaning on the side to lap up some of it and inevitably fell into it.

"But...but...how did you find me?" Squidward was besides himself. "There are so many people here, and I...I..."

Squilliam pretended to be shocked. "Why, Squiddy? I'm crushed! You thought I wouldn't find the time to seek out my oldest friend and catch up on things?"

Squidward's brow dropped into a scowl. "You mean so you can rub your success in my nose for the umpteenth time?"

"Well, yes." Squilliam admitted candidly. "But I was also curious to know what you've been up to? I haven't heard of you in almost two years, not since..." he stopped and pretended to ponder "...where was it that our paths last crossed again?"

Squidward seethed. Squilliam was egging him to admit about his latest humiliation at Squilliam's hands. Might as well get it over with.

"The Bikini Bottom's Community Rec Center." He grumbled. "I was led to believe they wanted me to hold a clarinet recital but..."

"But you were actually just called in to flip the music sheets for the real star of the evening." Squilliam said nostalgically. "Moi."

"Yeah, a real side-splitter that was." Squidward grumbled. "So, eh... can I get back to catering your guests?"

"There's no rush, Squiddy." Squilliam took his tray away and handed it over to a passing shrimp waiter and placed a fifty-dollar bill in his chest pocket.

He then put his tentacle over Squidward's shoulder. "As your temporary boss, I have the authority to give you a break for as long as I wish and your superior, Eugene Krabs was it? He can't do anything about it."

"That's what I was afraid off." Squidward said meekly as he was led through the crowded party by Squilliam.

"Is this shrimp on the tray?" the other waiter asked in a nasally voice but was ignored.

"So, what have you been up to?" Squilliam asked.

"Working as a lowly cashier, don't act like you don't know." Squidward grumbled, barely keeping his composure.

"I know about your day job, but I'm curious about something else? You've been rather inactive lately, no zany schemes to achieve fame and success that would inevitably lead to failure? To be frank, that was a major reason why I invited you to my party." Squilliam explained patronizingly, while maintaining his affable demeanor.

Typical Squilliam. He looked for any excuse to see Squidward squirm and as usual, he was being very insidious, trying to coax Squidward into admitting that he was an utter failure. But Squidward wouldn't give him that satisfaction, partially because he had nothing to say to him.

"That's because I'm not trying much these days." He said simply.

"But why, pray tell?" Squilliam smirked. "Are you suggesting that you lack the talent necessary to achieve the kind of success I have?"

Squidward felt very flustered. Truth be told, that fact had been dawning more and more on him at this point in his life. How could you tell yourself otherwise when you were a 57-year-old guy who was still working as a cashier at a fast-food joint and you were also the universe's kickball? But at the same time, how could you acknowledge that in front of your biggest rival while maintaining any shred of dignity?

"It's a simple question, Squiddy?"

"I...I....the crowd at the Bubble Bowl sure seemed to think I had talent!" he said abruptly.

Squilliam yawned. "That? Why are you bringing up such old stuff?" Squidward fumed.

"I'll admit, I was pleasantly surprised." Squilliam continued. "But that was *16 years ago*, old chum. And who remembers that event now? You might have been on to something but let's not kid ourselves. It was not meant to last. You knew you couldn't keep those scatterbrained roobs disciplined long enough to continue your

momentum. It was, in the end, just a one-hit-wonder, now buried by the sands of time."

Squidward scowled. "I also got Nicolas Withers to call my home fancier than yours."

"Eh.." Squilliam twirled his tentacle "...Withers has odd tastes, but once more, does anyone remember that now? Nope. What *do* they remember and still talk about? Oh, right, little ol' *me* ."

Now Squidward was at a loss for words. He had used his two biggest trump cards and they did little to win this verbal argument. Now he was out of ammo. And Squilliam very well knew it.

"You see, Squiddy, the true sign of success is not to have your fifteen minutes of fame, any nincompoop can do that if they try hard enough. No, no, you are a success only when you succeed at making a *lasting impression* on the world and that's something I've managed to do a long time ago, hence why I'm still a big success and not some washed-up hazbin like so many old colleagues of mine." Squilliam told him.

"So what point are you trying to make?" Squidward asked bitterly. He knew he was already defeated, Squilliam was just dragging it out.

"Well, not to step on any proverbial tentacles, but I simply wanted to know why you haven't been trying as much to achieve success lately?" Squilliam smirked. "Personally, the only explanation I can think of is that you've stopped believing in yourself?"

Squidward said nothing, he just looked away. Squilliam had read him like an open book.

"Because I really hope that's not true." Squilliam said with faux-worry as they came to a halt outside by the very busy and filled-up pool, and he turned around to confront Squidward face to face. "I sincerely hope that burning if misguided drive inside you hasn't finally been extinguished?"

"What drive?" Squidward inquired with contempt.

"You know what I like about you so much?" Squilliam sneered. "For all your faults, you are no quitter. No matter how many times you are met with failure, you still try again and again to become a star like me, despite inevitably failing in the end. To be honest, that's the thing that attracts me back to you time and time again."

"What do you mean 'attract'?"

Squilliam let out a hearty laugh, his nose inflating and deflating as he did so. "Don't play dumb, Squidward. I know you're not."

He put his tentacles on his hips. "You think you're the only person in this town who has an axe to grind with me? Far from it. The number of people that hate me could fill up the vault containing my fortune, but in the end, they don't matter one bit to me. They just come and go. They get mad at me and some try to publicly slander me only to fail at it and quickly be forgotten about by everyone, myself included. Same for the competition, many envious saps have tried to one-up me only to fail and never try again."

"And what makes me worthy of your attention then?" a crabby Squidward shrugged, now seriously confused. "If I'm just one in a million to you, why do you-"

"Oh, but you're not. You're *special* to me. Precisely because of your misguided determination." Squilliam huffed and pinched his cheek patronizingly. "You're the one opponent who keeps coming back, who keeps trying against all odds. And that's what makes our little rivalry so much fun. You are an endless source of entertainment."

"I don't know if I should admire you or pity you for your sheer gall." Squilliam let go and shrugged. "Maybe both, but the important thing is that, for all my riches, I am still a guy who can appreciate the simple things in life. And watching you squirm and make a fool out of yourself of your own volition is one of those."

Squidward's look of contempt melted to one of pitiful sadness. He didn't quite realize it at the time, but something broke inside of him that night. It took its time to manifest itself, but it was Squilliam's dressing down from that night that changed something inside of him.

"Well then, it's been nice as always chatting with you, but I really gotta go now." Squilliam said candidly and patted his head. "I've got plenty of other guests to greet."

He now placed a fifty-dollar bill in Squidward's chest pocket and patted it. "You've been doing a marvelous job catering though, so keep up the good work and I might give you a few more tips for your troubles." Squilliam said as he walked away. 'After all, serving food is your forte.'

As he let out his honking laughter, Squidward could do nothing but stand there and wallow in his own sorry thoughts, broken and defeated.

"Hey, Squidhwath?" Patrick slurred as he stumbled past him and hiccupped. "Suthm pathy, eh?"

A loud splash was soon heard, but Squidward didn't notice it.

That was incredibly brutal. I'm not trying to defend Squilliam at all, but he did, in his own egotistical way, make a fair point. Most of Squidward's humiliation, at least when it comes to his rivalry with Squilliam, was his own fault, as he was actively trying to one-up his rival, such as in "Squilliam Returns", "House Fancy" and "Professor Squidward". Squilliam's introduction in "Band Geeks" was the only canon example where it was truly him who goaded and manipulated Squidward into making a fool out of himself, which ironically wound up being one of the few canon empales' of Squidward experiencing genuine success.

But as Squilliam explained, it's one thing to have your fifteen minutes of fame, it's another to uphold it. Squilliam might be a huge jerk, but he knows the game and ultimately, he won his success more or less fair and square, since it is the public who ultimately decides who is going to be popular and who is not. If that wasn't obvious, there's plenty of social commentary during the two octopuses' conversation, with Squilliam being a classic example of a celebrity flaunting and abusing their power.

As was shown in "Band Geeks" and in his subsequent appearances, Squilliam defiantly is a sadist, given his gleeful enjoyment at seeing his old high school rival squirm, but at the same time I tried to be more nuanced with it. Logically, someone with Squilliam's celebrity status would have lots of enemies, so there needed to be a reason why he was fixated on a nobody like Squidward. My answer to that is that Squidward was the one enemy who kept coming back, who never gave up, hence he provided an endless source of entertainment for Squilliam.

I do feel kind of bad about making the events of "Band Geeks" meaningless in the end, but Nickelodeon already did that years ago by continuing on the show despite Hillenburg's wishes to end it after the first movie. Squilliam's comment about pointlessly bringing up old stuff mirrors the show's own sad fate when people claim it has merit, as it went from a critically lauded show with a wide appeal to an oversaturated, overcommercialized joke.

Regrets

Indiana Jones-style music was playing as Mr. Krabs's sword cut off branches and he barreled his way through a dense coral tree forest, looking disheveled and battered but also wearing a brand-new, snowy-white fur coat.

"Almost there...." He grinned eagerly despite the tired features on his face.

As he pushed some more branches out of the way, he was confronted by a maw of sharp teeth and a pair of piercing red eyes with slit pupils.

"Oh, c'mon..." Krabs rolled his eyes exasperatedly.

"Grrrrrr....." a huge lionfish emerged from the thicket and roared loudly, nearly blowing Krabs away in the process and covering him in spit.

But the old sailor was unfazed and he returned the favor.
"RAAAAAARRR!" he bellowed at the beast.

The lionfish dropped his ears and swam away while meowing like a newborn kitten, revealing a bright light just barely concealed behind another grove of coral trees.

"At last!" Krabs beamed. "I'm here!"

He pulled out a glass bottle from his backpack. "Another lifetime of makin' money, here I come!"

But first, he pulled out his phone and called the Krusty Krab. "Hello? Yes, Mr. Squidward, it be me." He said proudly, but then grew a sour frown.

"Of course I'm still alive, ye ninny! The jungle....eh...the *concrete jungle* ain't no match for me!" he barked. "Anyway, I have almost finished me errands in New Kelp City, so expect me back mannin' the Krusty Krab by tomorrow, seven o'clock sharp. See ya!"

He tucked his phone back into his backpack but after pondering for a moment, he pulled out two additional bottles.

"No point in wastin' a loyal and *cheap* two-man crew like 'em!" he figured before eagerly running towards his final destination. "Come t' pappa!"

Cue bubble transition...

The Krusty Krab, meanwhile, only saw a handful of customers even though it was already noon. Squidward figured that, considering what he saw on the local news last night, plenty of citizens didn't get the chance to say their goodbye to Squilliam yet. He doubted anyone who frequented the Krusty Krabs had known him personally, they were probably just fans of one of his albums or something.

It was such a slow day in fact, that Squidward had temporarily "promoted" Spongebob to double-duty and gave him his Krusty Krab hat, placing it right next to Spongebob's own. After calling an ambulance and having two paramedics revive the sponge from his bliss coma, Spongebob wasted no time getting to work, even though there wasn't much work to be done today. He had done all the chores yesterday.

Squidward just sat by a table with a newspaper, resting his head in his tentacle and contemplating. After a goodnight's rest, he was feeling just a tad better, his mind was a bit clearer but he still felt like there was something off. A world without Squilliam? That sounded like a dream come true, but something inside of Squidward kept nagging him, like he had some unfished business.

"Hey! Hey! Mr. Tentacles!" Spongebob waved from the counter like a child showing off his macaroni art.

Once Squidward finally glanced at him, Spongebob took the money from a customer, placed it in the register and then pulled a tray with a Krabby Patty and coke out of thin air and handed it to the fish, who just walked away confused, and more than a little unnerved.

"Come back soon, Norm!" Spongebob waved at him happily, and the light-olive fish with a purple dorsal fin and lips grinned and waved back awkwardly.

Norm remembered Spongebob the Fry Cook from when his father Nat used to bring him here. He remembered him as this cool and exuberant figure who served up amazing Krabby Patties and was a friend to all the children, like an underwater Ronald McDonald. Now though, Mr. Squarepants just felt odd, and more than a little creepy. Norm made a mental note to take his wife and children someplace else to eat from now on.

"Did I do good! Did I do good!" Spongebob turned to his boss, shaking with anticipation.

Squidward just gave him an unenthusiastic thumbs-up, making the sponge tremble with giddiness and giggle.

The door opened and a familiar mammal in a domed spacesuit walked in.

"Howdy, Spongebob!" the Texan squirrel waved.

"Hey, Sandy!" Spongebob greeted her. "What brings you here? Do you have a hankering for a Krabby Patty today!" he swung his fist exuberantly.

"Sure, why not. I 'aven't had any grub today." Sandy shrugged as she walked up to the counter. "But ah wanted t' see how you're doin'? What's the deal with thu double hat?"

"Oh, I'm on *double duty* today." Spongebob said like it was the most prestigious thing in the world. "Mr. Tentacles thinks I'm ready for it!"

Sandy sent the octopus a suspicious glare. "Ya mean he's makin' you do all the grunt work?"

Squidward rolled his eyes. "Sandy, get real? Customers ain't exactly flocking in today?" he deadpanned and gestured at the many empty tables, as only three were preoccupied by lone customers. Norm was munching on his patty and seemed eager to leave as quickly as possible. He needed to find a new dinner for lunch break.

"Oh, it's no big deal, Sandy. I relish doing this." Spongebob assured her. "It's the perfect opportunity to hone in my skills."

" You've worked here for two stinking decades. How much more time do you need to "hone in" your skills as a burger fool? " Squidward thought exasperatedly but said nothing.

"Well, alraaght then. How's Maddi....eh.." Sandy grew nervous "...ah mean Gary , how's Gary doin'?"

"Gary? He's doing great!" Spongebob told her exuberantly but his smile faltered a bit. "Well, now that you mention it, he has been acting a little funny? Once I came back home, he spent most of his time standing in a corner and looking at me weirdly, almost like he was scared."

Spongebob chuckled. "Why, if I didn't know any better, I'd say he was a stranger in his own home? But that's silly." He waved his hand dismissively.

Sandy was sweating and her dome was getting clouded by fog. She pulled one arm up and wiped the dome with a hanky from the inside.

"Yeah, that is weird?" she said sheepishly. "Doncha worry. He has probably just grown accustomed to roamin' thu open meadows at Blue's farm. He just needs to get reacquainted with his ol' surroundings?"

"I'm sure you're right, Sandy. You always know best." Spongebob bought it instantly. "Well, I'll have your patty done in no time! See ya in five minutes!" he jumped back and slid through the kitchen window.

Now alone, Sandy shifted awkwardly before Squidward broke the silence.

"Do you feel guilty, Sandy? Lying to your so-called best friend?" the octopus deadpanned while fiddling with his tentacle on the table.

"Ah thought I told ya this ain't yar business!" Sandy walked up to him and slammed her palms into the table. Squidward was unfazed.

"I kept my promise, I didn't say squat." He said lamely. "I just noticed how *you* seemed very uncomfortable lying to him."

The squirrel winced and took a step back. "Ah..ah ain't enjoyin' it, wise guy." She narrowed her eyes. "Ah know it's a crummy thing to do, but if he finds out, he'll be crushed. Ah don't want to see 'im crushed."

"Sure." Squidward droned.

"What's that supposed thu mean?" Sandy said accusingly.

"Nothing, I just said "sure"." Squidward replied, his eyes still focused on the newspaper.

Sandy was agitated, but the octopus gave her no opening to take the moral high ground. She almost wished that he made fun of her age again or something, so she would have an excuse to clock him. Taking a gander at the newspaper, she read the headline. She recalled reading that story two days ago.

"That Fancyson fellar bit the dust, huh?" she pointed at the article, specifically the picture showing the tombstone.

"Yes. Funny thing how so many people adore him and yet nobody bothered to put his *real* name on there? Probably don't know it." Squidward idly pointed at the tombstone.

"Wut?" Sandy made a face. "Squilliam Fancyson ain't his real name?"

"Nope." Squidward said impassively. "I oughta know, we were classmates in high school. His real name was actually Otto Mantelmeyer. And he ain't no "third" either, his dad's name was Thaddeus and he was a music teacher at community college."

"Community....? So that snob wasn't born rich?" Sandy asked.

"No siree, why else would he have been attending public school?" Squidward stated like it was the most obvious thing in the world.

Sandy made no comment. It did make sense now that she thought about it, as most celebrities used pseudonyms. Most of the rodeo cowboys she used to idolize as a little kid turned out to have much lamer names than what they used in the ring.

Squidward let out a humorless snort as an old memory came flooding back. "Y'know? I still remember when that talent agent spotted him playing the clarinet during our sophomore year talent show, that's what got his career rolling. That sleazeball was all like..."

He adopted a lisp and talked at a brisker pace. "You got talent, kid. But that name's gotta go. If you want to make it big you'll need a name with more.... *pizzaz* !"

His small smile melted into a bitter frown. "He also told *me* to check out the Krusty Krab after I get my diploma."

"Ya don't say? But then, why are ya in such a dour mood anyhow? Ah thought you and that yuppie hated each other like a coyote and

bobcat?" she inquired, less accusingly and more out of morbid curiosity.

"We sure did, I still loathe him with a burning passion." Squidward droned.

"Well, why aren't ya ecstatic then?" Sandy shrugged and sat next to him. "Ah'd shaw be happy if maah worst enemy kicked thu bucket?"

"I know, I've been asking myself the same thing." Squidward said, more to himself than to the squirrel. "But ever since I first read that article last night, I just felt....nothing."

"Nothin'?"

"Yes, nothing." Getting an idea, he finally looked at Sandy. "You're a scientist, right? Do you think something is wrong with me? Like physically?"

Sandy blinked, not sure what to say. "I dunno? Are ya hurtin'?"

"No, I don't feel any pain. I'm not sad, but I don't feel happy either. And I don't know why?" he raised his voice a little, his frustration growing. "As you said, I should be ecstatic that he croaked, but I'm not. I just feel nothing?"

That got the wheels in Sandy's head moving. She did have a keen interest in psychology, much like any other branch of science. Squidward's strange plight sure piqued her interest. But she was just as baffled as he was.

Musing, she once more pulled her arm up to her chin inside the suit, to rub it in contemplation.

"Maybe ya'll disappointed that ya never got thu last laugh?" she suggested.

"What now?"

"Weren't ya two rivals for a long time? Ya were always tryin' to stick it to 'im, without much success?"

"Don't remind me." Squidward rubbed his temple.

"Maybe that's why?" Sandy shrugged. "Ya feel cheated that ya never got yur revenge?"

"No, that's not it." Squidward replied with strong conviction. "I told you, I'm not feeling sad or disappointed, I just feel numb. Besides..."

He paused for a moment and reluctantly continued. "I've realized that Squilliam had pretty much won this feud a long time ago, if you could even call it a feud. I think I first realized it a few years back, the last time I spoke with Squilliam in person."

"What 'appened?"

"He rubbed his success in my face, as usual." Squidward sighed. "But something was different that time. He gave me a severe dressing down and yet.....I hate to admit it, but I feel like he gave me a reality check. I've been trying to upstage him for years, and it almost never worked. The few times I did, it didn't last. And he made sure to let me know. You might remember the Bubble Bowl thing, you were part of my band after all?"

Sandy grimaced. She remembered that event quite vividly, even if it had been nearly 20 years ago. She had still been a newcomer back then. She had no idea how Spongebob managed to get all those dunderheads to pull together and be a proper band for one night, but things went back to normal the next day. If you thought things were chaotic during the practice week before the big event, you'd seen nothing yet.

"Ah do, actually. We put on quite the show, huh?" she thought fondly, though the aftermath was anything but fond to her. "Ah didn't know back then just how....chaotic the folk of Bikini Bottom could git."

Now that she thought about it, while the citizens of this town never were all sunshine and rainbows, it felt like the new generation of Bikini Bottomites had gotten quite a bit nastier, ornerier and more judgmental, as well as more scatterbrained. Sandy had never quite integrated herself into this society, given how her only real friends who always had her back was Spongebob, but in the past, she didn't have to clean graffiti that hoodlums left on the glass of her treedome saying stuff like "Go back to the surface, air-breather!"

"You just couldn't beat that guy. He was too rich, too powerful, too influenceable, too sneaky, too..... lucky." Squidward lamented. "And yet for all those years, I was too stubborn to admit it. I refused to believe that he was better than me."

Squidward paused as a realization hit him. He thought back to their conversation from three years ago? Yes, he had been a huge fool, that wasn't news to him. But it also made him think of his feud with Squilliam in a different light. It was easy to blame Squilliam for all of it, not like he was blameless in any way. But just how blameless was Squidward in this?

"Yeesh, that sounds pretty rough when ya put it like thaaht?" Sandy replied attentively. "Look, Squidward? Just because someone's more successful than ya, doesn't mean they're "better". Money doesn't buy ya character or-"

"How is he *not* better than me in any conceivable way?" Squidward sighed tiredly and rested his forehead in his tentacle. "I have spent *40 years* trying to make something out of my life and what do I have to show for it? Zilch, I'm still stuck working in this same dump?"

Sandy grimaced. She was starting to pity the old octopus. No, not pity, she was feeling sorry for him. She had known that he was miserable and unlucky, but she never pondered much about it. She and him didn't talk much. They weren't friends after all, they just knew each other by proxy, since Spongebob touched both of their lives so much.

"Ah...ah'm sorry to hear that. Ah really am."

"Don't pity me."

Sandy scowled. "Ah ain't pityin' ya." She insisted curtly. "It's called *compassion* ."

"I know." Squidward replied, much to her surprise. "But don't feel sorry for me, really. I don't have anyone to blame for this but myself. I knew Lady Luck had dealt me a bad hand but I still could have avoided some of my grief, especially with Squilliam, if I had just eaten some humble pie."

"Don't be such a cynic for Pete's sake!" Sandy scolded him. "Ah know you 'ave quite the inflated ego but nobody deserves thu 'ave all their hopes and dreams crushed and 'ave some rich snob mock 'em for it."

Squidward didn't argue there. "Maybe, but what's the point now? Not like I can backpaddle and turn my life around. I made my bed and now I have to sleep in it. I already squandered my life."

Sandy didn't know what to say to that. She wanted to make him feel better somehow, but he was right. He was nearly 60 and he had accomplished none of his ambitions, he was just a cashier at a fast-food joint. It wasn't exactly a prestigious position. Spongebob was in no better position, but Sandy would have been hard-pressed to say he *wasn't* living his dream. The little yellow dude loved his job, flipping patties was his passion. Most people wouldn't call it a great job, but he did. He was a roaring success as far as he himself was concerned.

Mr. Krabs wasn't a big success either, but Sandy understood that as long as he had money to hoard, bathe in and take out to dinner, the old crustation was a happy camper. Patrick...Patrick just had no ambitions, he just wanted to lie around, stuff his face and play with Spongebob. He never once asked to practice karate like Spongebob

did. When your expectations were that low, failure and misery were statistically impossible.

"Well.....it can't be all bad? You're.....you're still alive, ain't ya?"
Yikes, that line sounded way better in her head.

"And you call that a good thing?" Squidward snarked, eliciting an unnerved look from the squirrel.

"Relax, I'm being *hyperbolic* when I say stuff like that, always have been."

"Ah don't appreciate such gallow humor, Squidward." Sandy scolded him once more.

"And they call *me* the humorless one." The octopus rolled his eyes.

Sandy's features softened a bit. "Hey, at least ya admitted to yur shortcomings? Doin' thaaht is harder that ya might think. Ah'd say that's an accomplishment. It takes a big man to admit the error of his ways. Ah'm pretty sure Squilliam could never 'ave done thaaht. Humble pie is one dish he never would have touched, even with a ten-foot poll."

"Yay me..." Squidward droned while lifting his tentacle up, now morphing to sport an index finger.

"Don't take this lightly, Squidward. Character matters a lot more than material possessions. At least ah think so."

"You do?" Squidward asked idly. Him actually being better at something at Squilliam? Now that was a crazy thought.

"Sure do, ah say that because ah know it ain't no pickin' daisies, swallowin' your own pride." Sandy continued and sighed. "Ah 'aven't always been the humblest landlubber, especially with all maah success."

"Your success?" Squidward asked, and upon receiving a cocked eyebrow from Sandy, he quickly added. "No, I'm not trying to make fun of you, it's just....you feel like succeeded at your dreams?"

"Ah guess ah do." Sandy also leaned on the table. "It's been a bumpy ride for sure. Ah remember when ah was just a kid? I excelled at all maah classes, both PE as well as all the academic ones. It sure didn't earn me a lot of friends though. A lot of kids were jealous, most of all the boys. Especially when ah kicked their keisters at the dojo."

"Ouch. Yeah, nobody likes being outclassed. I should know." Squidward replied, actually finding himself paying attention to her tale.

"Well, ah guess ah didn't help maah case by bein' a haughty little braggart." Sandy admitted, a little bashfully. "Tell me somethin'? Did ya 'ave to deal with naysayers?"

"Pffftttt....you need to ask? Too many to count. Including mother."

"Yur ma didn't believe in ya?" Sandy was surprised. Now she really did feel sorry for the old octopus.

"Nope, not even once." Squidward sighed. "She used to constantly tell me "Oh, Squiddums? Why can't you be more like that nice Otto boy?". And now she still has a shrine dedicated to Squilliam at her nursing home. In her old age, she keeps forgetting to call me on my birthday, but she can still recite all of Squilliam's greatest hits by heart."

Sandy whistled. "Jumpin' jackrabbits, and ah thought maah folks were bad."

"They weren't supportive of you?"

"As if." Sandy chuckled a bit. "Ma and Pa Cheeks are very old-fashioned rodents. They found all maah academic and athletic

achievements at school quaint at best. They thought it was silly for a gal to spend her spare time runnin' through the Badlands and wranglin' rattlesnakes, and coyotes, and whole sounders of angry javelinas."

"Oh, no." Sandy shook her head. "Ah wasn't sure if ah wanted to pursue a career as a scientist or an athlete. Ultimately, ah decided not to squander maah big noggin and continued doin' karate and other sports as a hobby. But ma and pa didn't approve of that. They just wanted me to marry some useless, musclebound farm boy and raise hordes of grandchildren fer them."

Squidward couldn't help but smirk as he envisioned Sandy as a housewife, decked out in a classic flower dress and apron, ironing out clothes in some little hillbilly cottage, with a burly male squirrel wearing a cowboy hat, a stained undershirt and ripped jeans with a huge belt buckle passed out in front of the tv, while dozens of little kits in diapers crawled all around them and were crying. Sandy's expression of pure misery made any Squidward himself had sported look quaint by comparison.

"But ah said "Nuts to that!" and grabbed thu first train out of Acornville the moment ah got accepted into maah dream college. And yes, that is the actual name of my hometown. 'aven't looked back since."

"You're bold and you don't compromise, I respect that." Squidward shrugged, but his sentiment was sincere.

"And look at me now?" Sandy spread her arms out for emphasis. "Ah'm a senior scientist at Tree Dome Enterprises Limited, still sittin' perdy from the 20-year extension of my contract with benefits that Lord Reginald offered me in 2006, may he rest in peace. And I'm a pioneer at pushing underwater treedomes as a means to study marine life in the field."

After getting no immediate response, Sandy shrank a bit. "Eh...sorry, didn't mean to brag."

"Nah, it's fine." Squidward waved his tentacle. "At least you're not being a total jerkwad about it, like a certain somebody that has left us."

He sighed. "At least some people can look back at their life and not have any regrets."

"Who said ah 'ave no regrets?" Sandy countered. "You think ah made no mistakes that ah regret now?"

Okay, now he really was curious. "Okay, color me intrigued. Just what could you be regretting?"

"Ah know how ya had to quit interpretive dancin'."

Squidward blinked. "How do you know that?"

"Spongebob." Sandy said simply. "You know the little square dude can be quite the blabbermouth. He still thinks you're just in a rut and will get back to dancin' in no time, but ah know better. Ah've been there."

"What? Square dancing?"

"No, ink-for-brains! Ah'm talkin' about karate, and pretty much anythin' else that requires stamina and physical strength." The Texan squirrel took on a more sullen tone.

Squidward wasn't following. "I was under the impression you had plenty of that?"

"Ah did, probably would still do, if ah didn't push maahself to the limit fer all these years. Ah always felt the need to go the distance, no matter what ah achieved, no matter how many records ah broke, I wasn't satisfied and ah kept pushin' myself to the limit. Folks told me that if ah didn't take breaks once in a while maah body would quit on me and...well...." Sandy's voice trailed off, her ears folded and she glanced down.

Squidward slowly put it together. "You're saying you can't do sports anymore?" he asked her, actually sounding sympathetic to her plight.

"Not quite but, yeah. Maah daredevil days are pretty much behind me. There's a lot of stuff ah had to kiss goodbye these last few years." Sandy rested her dome against her palm. "Ah know I'm not the youngest gal around these here parts, but ah'm 46, I ain't an old crone just yet. Ah probably could still be doin' a lot of those stunts in moderation if ah hadn't strained maah body while ah was in my prime. Now ah'm *really* feelin' the burnout."

Now it was her turn to let out a humorless chuckle. "Ah probably wouldn't be 'avin' gray hairs right now either if it hadn't been for maah intense lifestyle for the last 20 years."

"Oh...eh, I'm sorry." Was all Squidward could say. He wasn't good at this sensitivity stuff, but even he understood the tragic irony of your own passion turning into a poison that wound up corrupting you. That was pretty much his life story. It also occurred to him that Sandy's shame about her grey hairs wasn't due to her age.

"Don't be. That's what ah git fer bein' as stubborn as an ox." Sandy leaned back, her mood perking up a bit. "Guess you and ah have more in common than we thought, huh?"

"I guess, except you're *good* at what you do or used to do." Squidward shrugged, in a rare moment of self-deprecation. "At least you can look back to the old days knowing you were king....or...eh queen of the hills while you were in peak form."

"Yeah, ah have quite the scrapbook chroniclin' all my crazy exploits from the 2000s and 2010s. Spongebob helped out a lot in makin' that, mainly cuz he was there with me. Now, whenever we spar, he thinks his karate is improvin'.." Sandy chuckled "...when it's actually the other way around."

"And I have amassed a whole basement filled with art projects that nobody cared to look at." Squidward snarked.

"At least nobody can deny that ya were committed to your lifestyle as an artist." Sandy smiled. Then something hit her, she thought of a way to cheer the cynical cephalopod up. And it wasn't an empty moral platitude, but a real fact.

"Who knows? Maybe someday someone will find 'em and see a new value in 'em? People's tastes change all the thaahm. If ah know maah history, many famous artists were overlooked in life and only found fame after departin' from this here world."

"That's reassuring....I guess." Squidward shrugged. He wasn't sure if he cared about what people might think of his work long after he had passed away. What was the point if the artist himself wasn't there to enjoy the admiration?

But he didn't doubt that what Sandy said was true, given how he was familiar with the concept. Very familiar in fact. It wasn't that long ago that Mr. Krabs actually tried to *bump him off* so he could sell his art at a higher price. "Art's always more valuable once the artist is out of the picture" they say.

"Here ya go, Ms. Cheeks! One Krabby Patty Delux!" Spongebob finally arrived. He was tangled up in cobwebs and rope and had mustard stains and dust bunnies all over him. Both Squidward and Sandy's eyes widened, but neither felt compelled to ask what happened in the kitchen.

"I apologize for the delay." He bowed respectfully after placing her plate on the table. "The Krabby Patty is on the house." He added as compensation, before realizing something and looking over at Squidward for approval.

"I mean...if that's okay with you, *Mr. Tentacles* ."

Looking back at Sandy, Squidward shrugged. "Sure, it's on the house."

He gave the squirrel a small smirk. "What Ol' Eugene doesn't know won't hurt us, am I right?"

He felt gracious towards Sandy, but he couldn't lie. He also found perverse pleasure in sticking it to his boss's miserly ways behind his back, and this was the second time he had done it in less than 24 hours, after giving himself a shortened shift last day.

Sandy smiled back. She hadn't expected to have a pleasant conversation with misanthropist supreme, Squidward Q. Tentacles, but what do you know?

But then, all three heard the pitter-patter of tiny feet. They glanced at the floor and saw the bottle containing the Krabby Patty formula moving by itself past them.

"Oh, give me a break." Squidward rolled his eyes once more and picked up the bottle, revealing a familiar copepod beneath it.

"Hey! Give it back! I stole it fair and square!" Plankton cried in utter desperation.

The only one who seemed surprised was, big shock, Spongebob, who gasped overdramatically.

"Plankton! You're up to your old tricks I see!" he wagged his finger at the disgruntled thief. Squidward and Sandy exchanged tired glances.

"No! It's not fair! It's not fair! It's not fair!" Plankton fell to the floor and pounded it with his fists.

"Plankton, can't ya try to take your loss with...a little dignity?" Sandy asked him sarcastically, after watching the one-eyed felon who was, as far as they knew, as old as Mr. Krabs himself acting like a spoiled toddler.

"Really now? You thought you could escape through the front door?" Squidward asked him pitifully. "And don't you have anything better to

do?"

The sight in front of them was so pathetic, Squidward seriously considered just telling the little shrimp that this bottle was a dud and that there was no real formula to Krabs's fabled Krabby Patty, just a bunch of hearsays perpetuated by Krabs himself as free marketing meant to ensnare the gullible citizens. But he knew Krabs would have his hide if he did that, not to mention the fallout of having to deal with Spongebob crying his heart out for weeks after learning that his idol was a fraud.

"Better things to do? You're a riot, Squidward!" Plankton spat out bitterly as he got up. "What else do I have left but achieving my life's goal? My flipping marriage has been in shambles for years, Spot flew the coop and I'm even losing my integrity."

Sandy snorted. He was practically begging her to say it. "Ah didn't know ya had any to begin with, ya microscopic miscreant?"

"Fool! I'm talking about my *biological* integrity!" Plankton shot back. "I still haven't perfected my synthetic body!"

"Synthetic what now?" Sandy raised an eyebrow and right then, she, Squidward and Spongebob all saw a wet blotch appear on Plankton's side.

"What?!" he asked in a surly tone.

"Plankton? I think you're leaking?" an unnerved Squidward told him.

His pupil shrinking, Plankton looked at his side and saw it was indeed leaking and a patch of his dark-green skin fell off, making the others recoil in disgust.

Plankton cried and clutched his head. "Oh, no! I have to get back to my laboratory!"

"You-haven't-seen-the-last-of-me! Bla-bla-bla! You know the drill!" the copepod yelled quickly as he pushed the door open and ran back to the Chum Bucket.

But as he tried to open the door, it wouldn't budge. "What?!" Plankton panicked and used all his strength (which wasn't much) to try and open it.

He felt more blotches appear all over his body and shrieked in horror and felt himself. "The keys?! Where did I put the keys?!"

He proceeded to bang on the door. "Karen! Karen! Where are you! Open the door!" But he got no response.

Trembling with fear, Plankton felt his body sizzling now and that's when he knew his time had finally run out.

"Well, poop..." he droned tiredly as his eyelid dropped halfway. "I regret everything."

Squidward, Spongebob and Sandy could only watch in horror as Plankton's eye caved in, leaving behind a vacant black hole, his teeth fell out, his skin turned ashy grey and his antennas coiled up before his body shriveled up and crumbled into a pile of dust, which was soon swept away by a light current.

At the Krusty Krab, the trio was stupefied, or more accurately, utterly mortified.

"What just happened?" a slack-jawed Squidward asked.

Blinking in shock, Sandy gave her answer, "Ah guess that no-good varmint transferred his conscience into a new, artificial body to prolong his lifespan but he hasn't worked out all the kinks?" she deduced, earning odd looks from Spongebob and Squidward.

"Just an educated guess?" she shrugged.

R.I.P Sheldon J. Plankton. Let's be real. We all knew that guy would not go out on a bang, but on a whimper. And this is where I change the rating.

I finally got around giving my explanation for how Plankton is still alive (or used to be), despite being childhood friends with Mr. Krabs (yes, "Friend or Foe" is one of the episodes I factored into this saga). For him, some freaky mad science experiment felt the most appropriate. This was meant to be shown in "Some Things Never Change", but wound up not being used in order to keep the one-shot simple. While other characters are metaphorically "decaying", Plankton is doing both that while also *literally* decaying. The concept of the Krabby Patty formula being a fraud is something that I also used in "A Dash of Logic" and it felt fitting to include it in this version as well, given the overall cynical tone.

Squidward and Sandy do indeed have more in common than you might think at first glance. The biggest commonality is that both of them are generally rational characters stuck in a town full of crazy people, and both have egos, Squidward far more blatantly, but Sandy is no stranger to getting blinded by her pride either. Sandy felt like the only character that could logically have this kind of conversation with Squidward.

Looks like we're going for a fourth chapter. This was meant to be the final one, but the whole Krusty Krabs segment with Sandy went on for longer than I thought. Chapter four will definitely be the final one, as I only have one more scene planned, and it will go back to the Squidward/Squilliam feud.

About the idea of Squilliam Fancyson going by a fake name, that idea came naturally, given how common it is with real celebrities, who always adopt a more "flashy" stage name that most of their fans don't realize is a stage name. "Mantel" of course refers to the body part in octopuses and squids called a "mantel", with "Otto" being an obvious punny and also "unimpressive" name, and since it is German, I added the cliché

"meyer" suffix, at which point I also chose to name Squilliam's father "Thaddeus", as a nod to Squidward's German dub name.

And just to be clear, Mr. Krabs will *not* succeed at slipping a youth serum into Squidward and Spongebob's drinks, just in case I write a sequel to this. Something will happen to foil his plan. They are destined to die from old age, or some other premature but still natural factor XD

Parting Words

Despite the opportunity being right in front of him, he did not take it this time around. He didn't use his temporary position to shorten his shift once more. He didn't want to do it because he wanted to delay this for as long as possible. To mentally prepare himself for it. But there was an additional reason for the delay. Squidward had taken his sweet time coming here. He didn't want anyone bothering him when he came to do this. He didn't want to be seen here, let alone be caught up in a conversation with some mourning moron wishing to talk about what a great person his rival was.

This was the kind of thing that needed to be done in private, a private conversation between two life-long associates. Two life-long opponents. Maybe he shouldn't have been here. After all, you only came here if you wanted to have a tearful goodbye with a deceased friend or loved one, or to take potshots at them now that they could no longer oppose you. But Squidward didn't mean to do either of those things. He didn't bother stopping to buy any flowers, he walked past the flower shop without a single glance. He didn't come to pay his respects to anyone.

That's why he kept having second thoughts, kept asking himself why he was doing it. He had no obligation to do it, but something inside of him compelled him to do it. Grabbing a trench coat and tucking his tentacles into the pockets, he strolled through town as the sun was setting, taking his time getting to Bikini Bottom cemetery. To his relief, there weren't many people left there, especially not where he was heading. The place was rather serene, and a bit eerie, fitting for a cemetery. It was so quiet, Squidward heard nothing but his own suction cup noises as he kept walking, besides the occasional crowing black clam that flew by.

As he walked through the graveyard, he took the occasional glance at the graves of people he knew, or more accurately, was just aware of via association, usually with Spongebob. There was Mermaid

Man, along with Barnacle Boy, fittingly buried right next to his old partner; their tombstones were already withered from age and looked unkept; cracking, with algae growing on them and the writing on them was growing faint.

Only now did Squidward really get a sense of how much time had passed since the old superhero duo had still been walking among them. He saw some other familiar names along the way. Betsy Krabs, Marion Squarepants, people he might have seen but couldn't recall ever having a conversation with, and others he had only heard about, like Blue Squarepants.

Squidward saw the undertaker, some creepy anglerfish dressed in raggedy Victorian clothes including a top hat, placing a tiny tombstone in the dirt dedicated to Sheldon J. Plankton. He guessed Karen told them about her husband's passing? But there was no casket, as there was no body to be buried. Old Plankton wound up being cremated and had his ashes spread across the ocean, if entirely by accident. Squidward tried to not think too much about the horrendous sight.

But he wasn't here for any of these people. It didn't require much searching to find what he was looking for. His old classmate's tombstone towered over every other one in the area, you couldn't miss it. Undoubtedly, Squilliam would have been pleased with his final resting place. Squidward stopped in front of it. The structure dwarfed even him. For a while, he just stood there, watching it with an impassive expression.

"Really now, Otto?" he snarked calmly. "Your 35th birthday? Three years ago, it was your 36th birthday? All that success, and yet you couldn't kill your ego enough to admit about your real age? Did you really have such a way with words or are the nimrods that adored you that dense that they failed to notice that you've been around making a name for yourself since the 70s?"

Of course, he received no response. No smug retort about how you could be anything you wanted to be as long as you had money and

sway. Squidward just sighed and shook his head.

"If you were expecting me to dance on your grave or something, sorry to disappoint." He shrugged. "But I'm not giving you that satisfaction. That would just give you the last laugh, and that's not going to happen. You played me like a fiddle all my life and this is my last opportunity to show you that I have learned."

The tombstone was still deathly silent, as was to be expected. Squidward thought about if he had finally snapped, considering he was talking to a dead person, but if all those schmucks could do it with their departed loved ones, he sure as heck was allowed to do it with his old enemy without being judged.

"So why am I here, you may ask?" He didn't even humor him with the notion that he was here to pay his respects. He knew Squilliam was savvier than that. "To be frank, I don't really know either. I just felt the need to come and have one last chat."

He shifted awkwardly, but his expression remained stone cold. "I can't believe it's over? It kinda felt like we were meant to do this forever, or I at least expected you to outlive me. I gotta admit, I find it a tad embarrassing that it took me two days to realize you were gone, but you know that I'm a busy octopus, right? Getting entangled with Spongebob's insane escapades and all."

"I suppose I expected this feud of ours to end on some kind of grand note. I didn't expect you to go out on a whimper, just a heart attack, and I wasn't even there catering to witness your demise. I'm not bitter about it...okay maybe I am a little, but not like that would have made a difference. We both know you won this feud. You made that clear three years ago, I guess that was our big "final battle", if you want to call it that? Honestly, I don't think our relationship could even be called a "feud"? More like just me making an idiot out of myself and you being there to laugh at it."

"Who knows?" he shrugged his shoulders again. "If I had been more of a toadie in high school and kissed your butt like everyone else,

maybe things would have been different? Maybe I could have been your personal assistant and yes-man? Following you around, and feeding off the crumbs left in your wake? Given that you were Squilliam Fancyson III, scavenging your leftovers would have surely put me far above the average citizen of Bikini Bottom? Maybe you would have been gracious enough to bequeive some of your money to me in your final will, assuming you were even forward-thinking enough to have made one?"

"I still remember you making such an offer to me in college, just so you could assert your superiority and put me in my place. But I don't regret not taking the offer, not one bit. At least this way, I can say that I retained some of my dignity. But I do regret something and I think you deserve to know it."

Squidward paused. It had been hard enough to spit out all the things he had said, but now he really needed to swallow his pride. Taking in a deep breath, he braced himself.

"I regret letting all your teasing and baiting get to me. I regret making a fool out of myself and causing myself unimaginable grief just to show you up. It was childish, petty, short-sighted and a fool's errand, but I was too arrogant to admit it. Too arrogant to admit that the people of Bikini Bottom had spoken a long time ago. Squilliam was a star, Squidward was not, and I couldn't force any of them to change their tune. I realize that now."

"Yes, you heard right. I hope you're satisfied. I know a lot of my grief was on me. I brought it on myself by not knowing when to quit. Funny, right? You think a cynic like me would be one of the first people to call it quits? But I guess not. I could have avoided a lot of it, the five-star restaurant charade, or getting arrested for impersonating you. I could have avoided that if I had just been an adult and turned my back on you."

Squidward glanced at the ground and sighed. "But I couldn't do it. I was too consumed by envy. Of course I was envious of you. Not like you didn't know it. As you said? You succeeded at everything I ever

dreamed about. You were the guy who was living my dream. And like a high school queen bee, you had to rub it in my face at every chance, and like a high school dork, I had to take the bait and get triggered every single time. Guess neither of us really moved past our high school mentality for all these years, huh?"

"And now look at me?" he shrugged. "What has all of that brought me? Nothing. I just wasted my time and caused myself pain, and in the end, it was all for naught. It's amazing what pride and envy can do to a person. Galvanizing them from the inside until they are nothing but a hollow shell, brewing in self-pity and regretting not having made better choices while they still could. Gutted, broken, despondent, numb to everything, dead on the inside."

"But I guess all classic tragedies follow that pattern? The hero is the architect of their own demise through some tragic character flaw, the bad guy is more or less just there to get the ball rolling."

Squidward looked back at the tombstone. "So what now? You're gone and I'm still here? It feels strange not having you around anymore. For worse and worse, you were a constant in my life, something I had grown accustomed to. Who knows how much time I have left, but it will be weird spending it without you there to tease me and make me even more self-conscious about my lack of success."

Squidward let out a small, tired chuckle. "Listen to me? The way I'm phrasing it, it almost sounds like I miss you? I don't. I hated your guts and I still do. I just regret never taking the chance to walk away from you and not give you the satisfaction of getting to me for the umpteenth time. Well, as I alluded to oh-so subtly before..." he snaked "...you won this feud."

Squidward's eyes narrowed, his expression turned serious. "Yes, you are the victor and I'm here to admit it. But I'm also here to show you that I am the *bigger man*. I didn't come here to vent out my frustrations and pin the blame on you for all my misery. I came here to show you that I can admit to my own faults, even if took me four

decades to do so. I know that's something you never could have done in life. It's the one thing I can say I did better than you."

He folded his arms. "I'm sure such frivolous concepts such as accountability don't mean anything to you, but they do to other people I know; people who are also living their dream and don't feel the need to be smug about it or put others down for failing to do the same. I'm not just talking about Sandy but also Sp....spp...sppp..."

He braced himself. Come on, you could do it. "Spongebob. Yes... even him. He's a delusional moron, no doubts about that, and by all accounts, he ain't no success. But he is a success in his own eyes, being the town's best fry cook and he never felt the need to be a jerk about it. And that's something, considering he is working with a guy who couldn't fry patties to save his life and who somehow made a fried boot once trying to do Spongebob's job."

He paused once more. He was running out of things to say to Squilliam but there was one last thing the latter had to know. "Who knows? Maybe I'm just as delusional as the yellow cretin. Maybe all this is just some coping mechanism I have imposed on myself to shield my feeble psyche from the agonizing reality that my most-hated foe died a success while I have squandered my life and achieved zilch, and I will surely die like as I have lived, as a lowly nobody. Maybe that's the case, but you know what?"

"To Davy Jones's locker with that! I will try to enjoy what little time I have left regardless. I won't let you haunt me beyond the grave and make me miserable in my final years. Who knows how much time I have left and I sure as heck won't waste another second being bitter and wallowing in self-pity, least of all thinking about and being envious of *you*. Yes, knowing me, that ain't gonna be no walk in the park, but I will try my best to enjoy the life I have. I have made many mistakes and I'm not going to continue making more. Contrary to popular belief, you can still teach an old octopus new tricks."

Realizing he was getting a bit emotional, Squidward panted and tried to catch his breath. It wasn't a huge outburst but he took his time

collecting himself. He had done it, he had confronted Squilliam and told him everything that had been gnawing at him these last 24 hours. Squidward wasn't sure if he had taken a huge weight off himself, only time would tell, but he felt like he had done what needed to be done.

He realized now why the latter's death made him feel so hollow. Because their feud had ultimately led to nothing. Squilliam remained Squilliam, a successful millionaire, and Squidward remained Squidward, a penniless cashier. Nothing was achieved through their conflict, only lots of grief for Squidward. And now he had admitted it. Squidward wasn't any more successful from that, but felt just a smidge wiser and like had finally achieved something. Learn from his mistakes and move on.

He saw that the sun had set and it was getting dark. In the distance, he could hear incoming thunder. Exhaling, Squidward took one final glance at his old rival's final resting place.

"Goodbye, Squilliam." He nodded impassively and turned around, having no intention of returning here again. Tucking his tentacles back into his pockets, he made his way back home, content with having buried the hatchet, as well as his life-long rivalry with Squilliam here, at the Bikini Bottom cemetery. With or without Squilliam, his life would go on.

Well, if there's one message you can take away from this, it's the ye ol' "Revenge, the most meaningless of causes" lesson. If you spend your entire life hating and envying someone, it will ultimately leave you feeling empty and hollow. Even hearing that the person you despised kicked the bucket will be of little comfort to you if your own life is still the same, unfulfilled, empty and filled regrets, and you look back, thinking about how you could have spent your time in far more productive ways than chasing a stubborn pipe dream and engaging in a very one-sided and heavily rigged feud.

The other message you can take away from this is "Know when to quit." There's a difference between iron-willed determination and stubborn denial. If you don't call it quits after being met with failure some two dozen times or so, it's safe to say the former had morphed into the latter. I think most would agree that this transition happened to Squidward not long after the first movie. He really should have taken the memo, but status quo is God, and we couldn't have Squidward change or grow as a character. Squidward wouldn't be Squidward if he ate humble pie, but watching him being put through the wringer for 20 years, long after the show itself had peaked, ceased being funny or relatable a while ago and just became depressing after a point.

I'm not saying Squidward himself is a bad person or that deserved what he got, I'm saying he's human (or anthro-animal?) and he made the same kind of mistakes real people who are blinded by their own hubris and justifiable frustration with life would make. And like with real people, it ultimately left him broken and hollow, regretting his life choices.

Yes, even with the humor sprinkled throughout, this was not an uplifting story by any stretch of the word, but neither is the real-life story of Spongebob Squarepants as a show, which started out as a simple cartoon trying to make people laugh with witty comedy, but then turned into a sad, sad embodiment of corporate greed, and now, with Stephen Hillenburg's premature passing and Nickelodeon forcing the stupidest spin-offs imaginable into production, Spongebob is in as sorry of a state as it has ever been.